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October 28, 2020

The Honorable Andrew Saul
Commissioner
Social Security Administration
6401 Security Boulevard
Baltimore, MD 21207

Dear Commissioner Saul:

I write to express concerns regarding day-to-day struggles my most vulnerable constituents are facing during the coronavirus pandemic, many of which relate to their ability to access Social Security Administration (SSA) services.

I appreciate the significant operational challenges that the pandemic poses to the agency, and I commend SSA's response to the national public health emergency, including swiftly closing all field offices on March 17, 2020. However, the unprecedented volume of inquiries my office has received makes clear that there are too many people suffering because they cannot promptly access your hardworking staff, and when they do, constituents require more assistance than can be currently offered.

I would like to raise several questions regarding current SSA procedures, as well as to partner with SSA to seek operational changes designed to meet the unique service challenges required at this trying time. My constituents raise a number of concerns that fall into three main categories:

- (1) Many Social Security beneficiaries are concerned because they did not receive—or experienced significant delays in receiving—their stimulus benefits pursuant to the CARES Act, particularly valuable \$500 payments for their dependents. Although SSA does not control when those benefits are released, due to the special hurdles for SSA recipients, SSA staff should be trained to be able to triage questions about these valuable benefits.

- Furthermore, many Social Security program recipients with eligible dependents are unaware that there is still time to submit the information required to get their \$500 per eligible child this year. How, specifically, is SSA advertising to beneficiaries that they can still seek dependent EIPs by using the IRS portal?
- (2) People with disabilities and the elderly are facing extensive hurdles accessing SSA services due to the compounding logistical issues of: SSA’s closed field offices; limited online services (as well as limited access to online services); significant problems and delays in Pennsylvania’s mail system; limited in person appointments; and long delays on SSA’s 800 number.
 - There has been a significant decline in disability applications since SSA closed its offices, and I know it is not due to improved health in my area. SSA only offers online application processes for some disability benefits, requiring others to face long waits on the phone. I am concerned that complicated and elusive processes prevent people from applying for much-needed benefits—are there specific plans to address these challenges?
 - The lack of in-person appointments also makes the appeals process complicated and hard to navigate. Currently the process is to call and request that the appeal be mailed to the applicant, with the applicant then completing the form and mailing it back. People have 60 days from the date on the notice of the denial or adverse decision, plus five days for mailing, to appeal. Are there any efforts underway to streamline the process?
- (3) Beneficiaries are rightfully deeply concerned about overpayments. Because field offices are not open, and due to delays in United States Postal Service delivery, they are struggling to appeal or respond to these notices.
 - I appreciate that as part of normal business operations, SSA needs to seek any benefits it has paid in excess of what it is due, but these are not normal circumstances. Many of my constituents have expressed deep concern about receiving overpayments notices, which raise anxiety and threaten their financial security. While I appreciate the Social Security Administration’s recent decision to publish an interim final rule streamlining aspects of the overpayment appeals process, I am concerned that low-income individuals who incurred overpayment—through no fault of their own—should even be subject to overpayment collection during this unprecedented public health and economic crisis. I commend SSA for pausing overpayment collections from March – August 2020. Is SSA planning on establishing a similar pause period again?
 - I am also concerned that many of those who would stand the most from learning about the agency’s updated waiver process are not likely to hear about it unless SSA invests in a major effort to publicize the rule. Is SSA investing in any types of advertising efforts to this end? I would also encourage SSA to automatically

waive overpayments incurred during periods of the pandemic when SSA paused certain workloads.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of these matters. I look forward to working with you to ensure SSA serves Americans in need as swiftly and comprehensively as possible during this difficult time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Susalinda". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "S" and a decorative flourish at the end.